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E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: CANADA CRITICIZES IRAN'S ARRESTS OF BAHAI FOLLOWERS

REF: OTTAWA 162; STATE 12108

¶1. (U) In a statement on February 14, Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon criticized Iran for its recent detention of seven Baha'i followers, which he called "unacceptable," as well as for other human rights violations. He called on Iran to adopt "meaningful change in its human rights practices." His remarks echoed a recent expression of concern on human rights problems in Iran by Prime Minister Stephen Harper (ref a). Full text in para 2.

¶2. (U) Begin text

"Canada deplores Iran's detention of seven more members of the Iranian Baha'i community today. Alaeddin Khanjani, Ashkan Bassari, Maria Jafari Ehsani, Bashir Ehsani, Romina Zabihiyan and Houtan Sistani were arrested this morning. Mona Misaghi was arrested on February 10, 2010. These individuals appear to have been detained on the basis of their faith. This is unacceptable. We call on the Iranian authorities to ensure the immediate and safe release of these individuals, as well as all other members of the Baha'i community currently in detention, without delay.

"Despite being a party to several human-rights conventions, Iran continues to disregard the rights of its people. We urge Iran to live up to its commitments and obligations under domestic and international law, and to begin adopting meaningful change in its human rights practices.

"Canada will continue to express its grave concerns regarding Iran's history of abuse against religious minorities. For years, the Baha'i community in particular has been targeted by the Iranian government and subjected to persecution, discrimination and detention, despite the community's peaceful nature. The Iranian government has waged a systematic propaganda campaign against the Baha'i faith, employing all forms of state-controlled media to incite hatred and suspicion against the Baha'i."

End text
JACOBSON